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ABSTRACT

In an examination of the characteristics of universities, a plan for an educational linkage unit to facilitate lifelong learning is suggested. The five functions of higher education are defined as trusteeship of cognitive culture, research and graduate training, socialization, certification, and service to society. Factors influencing change are identified and include, in part, greater diversity of student populations, pressures of inflation, and growth and complexity of the knowledge base. Reasons for the difficulty higher education has had in responding to the need for change are examined. Among the reasons cited are the lack of a mandate, staffing problems, the existing reward system, and inflexibility. The education linkage unit is proposed as one solution. The units would provide (1) diversity through linkage with other institutions and resources of learning; (2) brokerage, enabling needs to be met as they arose by going without the institution for funding; and (3) catalyst, providing a neutral forum for exchange. Characteristics of the education linkage unit are outlined, including such elements as active involvement of community service groups in curriculum and program development. Suggested activity areas for the unit are described (e.g., designing, implementing, and evaluating community-based educational programs in parenting and family skills, career vocational planning, and other related activities). (PHR)

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TOWARD A UNIVERSITY-BASED FLEXIBILITY IN LIFELONG LEARNING

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Background

The evolution of higher education in the United States is well documented. What is easy to ignore, particularly in the face of the view of universities and colleges as static monoliths, is that their environment has been one of steady change. As was the case with other institutions earlier in the country's history, these changes came about slowly. The following significant events each contributed to the modification of the small cohesive single purpose institution that at one time completely characterized American higher education. The first of these was the Morrill Federal Land Grant Act of 1862. This act gave to each of the states public land or land script equal to 30,000 acres for each senator and representative under the apportionment of 1860 for the purposes of encouraging branches of learning related to agriculture and the mechanical arts. In 1890 a second Morrill Act was passed that provided regular annual appropriations for the land grant colleges. Then came the "Wisconsin Idea" under the progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt and Robert LaFollette which declared the boundaries of the University of Wisconsin to be the boundaries of the state. This approach was quickly adopted elsewhere. Urban and agricultural extension activities flourished even at private institutions such as Chicago, Cornell and Columbia. This marked the introduction of the idea of the university's public service mission to the nation. The Hatch Act of 1887 gave impetus to this movement by providing federal funds for the creation of Agricultural Experiment Stations.

To the elements of undergraduate education and now public service,

came a third--graduate education. Initially a Germanic concept, graduate education and training took root with the building of the Johns Hopkins University (1894) and the University of Michigan (1817). In more modern times, not so neatly recognizable, but of prevailing impact, was the increasing flow of federal funds, chiefly in the form of grants, to campuses across the country. The steady trickle became a rushing flow by the late 1950's.

The Present Characteristics of Higher Education[1]

The above changes have helped to define the higher education environment. As we will see, change continues to impact on the ivied wall. Presently, however, it is safe to define higher education as performing five functions--none safe from change pressures.

Trusteeship of Cognitive Culture. Academics, the learned, or the elders have always had a primary and special function in society; to act as trustees of the cognitive culture and the interests associated with it. Even such a seemingly incontestable function has born buffets. Robert Paul Wolff has written:

> "Most ancient is the study of religious texts which flourished in the Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic tradition of the ancient and medieval world. The object of the study was not the world...but a body of writing divinely inspired.."[2]

Cries of the 1960's for "relevance", the choice of objectivity vs. subjectivity, integrity vs. activism, and engagement in reform have all reared up to beset the ivory tower.

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[1]Talcott, Parsons and Gerald Platt, The American University (Cambridge: Harvard, 1973), p.144.

[2]Robert Paul Wolff, The Ideal of the University (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p.4.

Research and Graduate Training. Research or scholarship, seeking knowledge for its own sake, has its roots in the traditional study of the ancient texts and the accompanying commentary. Such activities still flourish. The real concern today is the differentiation between two primary kinds of research: pure and applied. The scholarship just referred to is generally of the "pure" variety. However, the tremendous growth of technological society has raised the demand for--and increasing government support has emphasized--immediate problem-oriented or action research. This made the various applied research fields on campuses big business involving big money and bestowed on practitioners a considerable measure of power.

Here too, critics have been active. The lockstep rigidity and single model approach to graduate education and the production of individuals who all have the same pattern of specialties have been roundly criticized, by Jencks and Riesman,[3] to name only two; and resoundingly supported by Parsons and Platt,[4] among others.

Socialization Function. The socialization function of the college experience, once accepted as a pro forma element of college life is also under pressure to change. The isolation of students from the world at large, Erikson's moratorium,[5] the ignored needs of nearby communities, and the desirability of residential emphasis have all been debated both on campus and off.

Certification. The certification function of higher education, that of labeling and sorting, is one that goes hand in hand with the

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[3]Christopher Jencks, and David Riesman, The Academic Revolution (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969), p.516.

[4]Parsons and Platt, p.93

[5]Eric Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1964).

socialization function just mentioned. The pressures for change in this area are grounded in the extent to which the universities and colleges should be involved in certification. Jencks and Riesman pragmatically argue that the colleges' and universities' chief function is not education but certification.

> "Virtually every college course culminates in an examination and a grade, and virtually all college curricula lead to some sort of diploma or degree. A college that does not sort and label its students in this way cannot find a clientele--at least we know of none that has done so over any considerable period of time. A 'college' that does not offer any instruction, on the other hand, can still find a market for its degrees."[6]

Robert Paul Wolff, on the other hand, anguishes over the contradictions between professional initiation and requirements for certification.

> "The relationship of professor to student in this initiation is rather like that of master to apprentice. The two seek one another out freely and establish a bond, by mutual agreement, which is moral and emotional as well as intellectual...
>
> Graduate education has a professional as well as nonprofessional component. The professional component is the procedure of certification, leading characteristically to the conferring of a degree...
>
> The nonprofessional component in graduate education is the intellectual, emotional, and more interaction through which a student learns from a professor what it is to be a creative intellect.
>
> The conflict between professional certification and intellectual initiation destroys the coherence of graduate education in American universities. At every turn, professors and students find themselves torn by the contradictory standards and divergent demands of the two activities. The result has been to make the process of certification needlessly painful and to corrupt the process of initiation."[7]

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[6] Jencks and Riesman, p.61

[7] Wolff, p.22-23.

Service to Society. The question is not whether the university has any societal obligations, but what kind, at what level, and at what price? All institutions in the 1970's are compelled to perform some social service functions. While students have become less vocal, nearby communities and potential constituents/consumers have adopted student rhetoric and they're demanding that higher education institutions serve them. They have some right to expect it, particularly from state institutions. Previously both public and private institutions were loathe to reorder internal priorities and instead sought external, or at least additional funding for these services or outreach programs.

Pressures for Continuing Accelerated Change

As has been suggested, none of the above five functions are free from pressures which must ultimately bring about changes at a swifter rate than those mentioned previously. Among the more potent influential factors are those originating in the social and economic sector. Space limitations within this document suggest that only a listing without amplifications is practical:

- increasing speed of social changes impacting on the education sector
- more diversity of student populations
- demands for access of society at large
- demands for individuals and groups to honor capacity and performance achieved beyond traditional educational programs
- increasing demands for career-oriented education and demands for education/earning power relationship
- pressures of inflation in a climate of dwindling financial and legislative support

- the difficulty of higher education's definition of its role in educating adults at various life stages
- growth and increasing complexity of the knowledge base
- dwindling numbers of students in the traditional 18-21 age group
- restiveness in the public mind concerning appropriateness of higher education's procedures in relation to cost vs. results.

Why Response Is Difficult

As was commented on earlier, higher education has been repeatedly under pressures and has, after its fashion, always responded. The difficulty in reacting to these newer pressures is that the headlong rush of western society demands more rapid and accurate response than was previously expected. Additionally higher education, and specifically the universities, are being charged to educate ever increasing areas of populations. More so now than ever before does the issue of "lifelong learning" arise--and potently. Assuming all good will--and saying nothing of the obvious well-entrenched hierarchies and interest groups--the ability of existing educational resources and procedures to deliver services to this broadened group of learners is inhibited by the following real factors.

Lack of mandate. Though much discussion has taken place in the higher education arena, no real mandate for institutions of higher learning to serve the increasingly diversified needs of the lifelong learner group exists at the present time.

Classroom emphasis. The pronounced and honorable tradition behind fixed site lecturer-to-student formats prevails from coast to coast.

Staffing problems. Though the spectrum of campus-based human resources at first appears extensive, difficulties exist in selecting appropriate, interested faculty, students and others to serve in connection with lifelong learning programs.

Credentialing and licensing. The present emphasis within the higher education area is the traditional provision of credentials and other licenses. While nondegree, experientially based learning and on-the-job training are unquestionably needed, the existing system responds more toward protecting the degree granting processes than in helping to meet the needs of an ever increasing diverse client group.

Existing reward system. Sometimes obscured in a discussion of the lifelong learning problem is the higher education reward system which does not encourage participation in broad service roles, which includes assisting diverse social groups of varying ages and needs. Publications, research, classroom teaching, in that order, are the determinants for reward, i.e. tenure and attendant perks.

Unresponsiveness. Traditional academic mechanisms, though somewhat more responsive than in an earlier day, still fall far short of the "reaction times" necessary to meet the needs of lifelong learners which are subject to rapid change. When the academy attempts to respond to new areas by creating courses and enrolling students, inevitably by the time the mechanism is in place, the old needs are dying and new ones are arising which clamor for attention.

Inflexibility. The existing higher education mechanisms are set up in such a way as to make it difficult or impossible to provide flexibility in site choice, forms of instruction, duration, variant scheduling, and so forth. Too often even "flexible" continuing education units are so only within the expected limitations of classroom laboratory, time

frame, and so forth.

Isolation. Without question the university is to considerable measure isolated from community, government, and business, those areas of society in which potential lifelong learners are found. Unintentionally the university's back is turned to whole blocs of individuals from which a learning group can be derived, and to which a wide range of educational services can be delivered.[8]

Towards a Solution: The Education Linkage Unit

True, there are problems, but in fact already in place in many states' educational frameworks, but relatively isolated, are various educational options, albeit most certification-oriented and campus-centered. These are real points of departure and represent strengths on which to build in meeting the needs of the lifelong learner.

For example, here at the University of Massachusetts we have a number of such options in place: The Bachelor's Degree in Independent Concentration in which students largely design their own program of study; the University Without Walls in which limited amount of credit is given for experiential learning; Continuing Education which offers university-housed courses of study determined largely by student interest; fragmented outreach programs grounded in a number of departments; and the Agricultural Extension Service housed here on campus but reaching all counties in the Commonwealth; and an extensive community college system. Not sufficient resources or flexibility to meet the total lifelong learning needs by any view, but assets nonetheless.

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[8]Edward Harris, Experiential Learning and University Credentialing. Unpublished dissertation (Amherst, Mass., School of Education, University of Massachusetts, 1975) pp. 77-85.

It is the Institute for Governmental Services' position that in consideration of the immense resources already committed that the most logical base for educational programs to meet the needs of the ever growing body of lifelong learners is the university. It is important to note initially that what is advocated is not to establish bureaucracies beyond those already in existence or to seek growth in a time when resources are in short supply. Our line of reasoning is the creation of small autonomous lifelong learning-oriented "Education Linkage Units" which work to provide the following:

Diversity through linkage. Rather than try to do everything for everyone the conceived Education Linkage Unit would not attempt to meet varying educational needs by itself. Rather it would achieve diversity by identifying resources to meet the existing needs and devising methods to bring the two together.

Brokerage. The Education Linkage Unit would be turned to as specific educational needs arise. If no ongoing programs or procedures were in place to meet a specific need, the Unit would develop them. If necessary the Unit, in its brokerage role, would also seek out and secure funding from appropriate sources. When the need has been met, no major dismantling or readjustments need to take place. Old linkages are dissolved--new needs are targeted.

Catalyst. When individuals, citizens, agencies, and municipal governments develop educational needs, they are frequently unable to resolve them on their own "turf". Hierarchies, staff personalities, limited resources, and politics, can frequently be counterproductive in terms of organizing for education or training. The availability of a neutral forum, where proven experience in the creating of educational

programs resides, can frequently work to generate new approaches in a creative atmosphere.

The Characteristics of the Education Linkage Unit

Speaking more specifically now, the Education Linkage Unit would be characterized by:

- Active involvement of community service groups in curriculum and program development within the Education Linkage Unit
- Concern for midlife career change as an element of lifelong learning
- Screening and access mechanisms through which private sector, community service, government, and other personnel can receive the style and type of education they require
- While developed programs would not necessarily be certification-oriented, the Education Linkage would have mechanisms in place to meet such demands if appropriate
- Development of extensive human networks reaching into local and state government agencies aimed at improving and augmenting training and education for governmental personnel
- Active pursuit of supplemental sources of funds including discretionary grants, support from private industry, trade unions, student held educational chits, and so forth
- Well developed counseling networks able to support and contribute to the educational planning of the diversity of lifelong learners
- Integration of career and vocational training concepts as an element of the lifelong learning process.

Suggested Activity Areas for the Education Linkage Unit

The activity areas open to such Education Linkage Units in view

of the wide expanse of lifelong learning are broad. Anticipated extensive interlinkages to further broaden these units' capacities to deal with varying educational problem areas would follow naturally as a result of their activities. Action areas for such units might be:

- designing, implementing, and evaluating community-based educational programs in parenting and family skills, career vocational planning, and other related activities
- study of systems of financially supporting lifelong learning
- developing access mechanisms for community human service personnel to appropriate curriculums, skill level training and credentialing programs
- designing and implementing a leadership training model for effective administration of lifelong learning processes
- actively working with various institutions to develop viable models involving shifting patterns of study/work/training within a lifelong learning framework
- studying mid-life career change in connection with lifelong learning, possibly including psychological, emotional, and health interrelations
- identifying and developing programs that make available sharply focused training and education to targeted client groups at no or minimal cost
- investigating the practicality of developing model programs linking varied learning activities with the private sector in a quid-pro-quo framework profitable to all participants/actors
- dissemination in print and other media forms of program results, research findings, and practical how-to documents, such as manuals and handbooks
- working with appropriate elements of state educational administrative units to develop comprehensive statewide plans for the major components of lifelong learning.

This has been a superficial look at what we here at the Institute feel is a significant step in beginning to solve education's dual dilemma: demands to (1) expand the group to whom educational services are delivered, extending learning until it truly becomes lifelong, and (2) to perform in an atmosphere of limited resources. An appropriate metaphor exists on all campuses: no more new buildings are going up; it's time we built bridges among them that reach out to society at large.

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